

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 904

CG 019 584

AUTHOR Bergquist, Diane K.; And Others
TITLE Women's Attitudes and Educational Aspirations.
PUB DATE [85]
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aspiration; College Students; Daughters; *Employed Women; *Females; Higher Education; Majors (Students); Mothers; Parent Child Relationship; *Role Models; *Sex Role; *Student Attitudes; *Student Educational Objectives

ABSTRACT

If theories of career decision-making among women are to emerge, research needs to investigate how the need to balance work and family roles affects women's career decisions. A study was undertaken to learn more about college women's attitudes toward their mothers, sex roles, higher education, and careers. College women (N=109) completed the Revised Fand Sex-Role Attitude Inventory (Fand-R), the Career Choice Questionnaire, and the Role Model Questionnaire. Fand-R measures self-orientation (a desire to formulate a personal identity and to fulfill personal potential) and other-orientation (the indirect realization of self through fostering the fulfillment of the "other," e.g., husband, children). The results revealed that students labeled as having nontraditional majors were no more self-oriented in their attitudes toward women's roles than were students labeled as having traditional majors. Other findings showed that daughters of working mothers tended to have higher educational aspirations than did daughters of nonworking mothers. Subjects labeled nontraditional did not perceive their mothers as positive role models. Future research needs to examine the role models that women emulate, the importance women place on interpersonal and family relationships at different stages in their development, and the factors that influence their career decision-making. (NB)

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ED277904

Womens' Attitudes and Educational Aspirations

Diane K. Bergquist, Sherry B. Borgers, Nona Tollefson

The University of Kansas

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Abstract

The attitudes of 109 females toward their mothers and careers were examined. Females labeled nontraditional did not perceive their mothers as positive role models; however, differences in aspirations to higher education were found between daughters of working and nonworking mothers.

Womens' Attitudes and Educational Aspirations

Recent employment trends indicate that more women than ever before are pursuing work outside the home (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1985). Not only are women entering the work force in increasing numbers, but they are also doing jobs once thought to be exclusively for males. The greatest increase of women in the work force has been among married mothers with preschool and schoolage children (Sheils, 1983). For the first time in history, working mothers are outnumbering housewives (Friedan, 1981).

Theories of career development and career choice, until recently, focused on the career development of men; as Tittle (1981) noted, theorists have not recognized that career decision-making may be different for men and women. Personal factors such as ability, interests, and personality and family factors such as socioeconomic status have been shown to be related to career choice for men and women; the relationships between these factors and career choice have, however, not been as strong for women as for men. Epstein and Bronzaft (1974) found that women at all levels of ability planned to spend more time involved in family activities than did men. Austin and Myint (1971) found that interest and personality variables were not as effective in predicting occupational choice for women as they were for men. Angrist and Almquist (1975) suggested that career decision-making for women is complicated by the wider range of life options available to women and by their traditional roles of homemaking and child care. If theories of career decision-making among women are to emerge, research needs to investigate how the need to balance work and family roles affects womens' career decisions.

The relationship between mothers and daughters has an impact on the daughters' adult life. The first significant role model in a woman's life is her mother. Nickles and Ashcraft (1981) indicate that a woman's decision to work, her choice of career, and her propensity for success can be traced to her mother's influence. Much of the literature suggests that a working mother does provide a positive role model for her children, whether they be male or female (Altman & Grossman, 1977; Baruch, 1972; Hoffman, 1974; Meier, 1972).

The purpose of this study was to learn more about college women's attitudes toward sex roles and toward higher education. The first hypothesis posited mean difference in sex-role attitude scores as measured by the Revised Fand Sex Role Attitude Inventory between groups of women who had chosen traditional and nontraditional majors. The second hypothesis posited differences in the frequency with which women who aspired to graduate degrees reported that their mothers were employed or unemployed. The third hypothesis posited a relationship between sex-role attitude and perceptions* of mother as a positive role model.

Method

Sample. The 109 college women were from a population of 150 undergraduates living in four scholarship halls at a large midwestern university. The researcher asked at a regular hall meeting for volunteers to participate in a study designed to learn more about women 109 volunteered. All were full-time students with GPA's of 2.5 or better; their mean age was 19.8 years.

Instruments. Each participant completed three instruments: the Revised Fand Sex-Role Attitude Inventory (Fand-R) (Gump, 1972), the Career

Choice Questionnaire, and the Role Model Questionnaire. The Fand-R is a revised version of the original Fand Inventory (Fand, 1955); it includes 24 items and measures a self-orientation and an other-orientation. The self-orientation (low scores) reflects a desire to formulate a personal identity and to seek fulfillment of personal potential. The other-orientation (high scores) typifies "a person who conceives of herself as the counterpart, the 'other' of the man (and children) in her life and realizes herself indirectly by fostering their fulfillment" (Fand, 1955). The Fand-R has an internal consistency reliability (corrected split half) of .81. Gump (1972) reports that the other and self constructs were validated in her sample of 162 women at Rochester in regard to selection of careers.

Role Model Questionnaire. This self-report instrument was developed from Kahn's (1982) interview questionnaire. Kahn had used semi-structured interviews to gain descriptions of women students' perceptions of their parents' marriage, their mothers' roles, and their mothers' perceived satisfaction with their role. The items used by Kahn were translated into attitude items. The questionnaire consisted of 14 items and women responded using a 4-point Likert scale. The questions asked for perceptions of mothers' attitudes and actions. Examples are: "I perceived my mother as being satisfied with her work." "My mother always took an interest in my activities." High scores on the questionnaire indicated dissatisfaction with the role model provided by the mother. Reliability and validity information for this instrument has not been established.

Career Choice Questionnaire. A 10 item, self-report questionnaire was used to assess respondents' educational and career plans. Information concerning participants' majors, goals, and future plans was obtained from these items. The Career Choice Questionnaire also provided information

about the educational and vocational characteristics of the respondents' mothers. On the basis of college major, participants were divided into traditional (English, Humanities, Human Development, Psychology, Sociology, Education, Fine Arts, Journalism, Social Work, Medical Technology, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy) and nontraditional (Premedicine, Prelaw, Engineering, Pharmacy, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Mathematics, Computer Science, Architecture, Business, and Geology) groups. The assignment of majors to the traditional and nontraditional groups was based upon the percentage of women employed in these fields as reported by the U.S. Census (1985). This grouping was further validated by three professors who were asked to classify the majors as traditional or nontraditional majors for women. The three judges agreed among themselves and with the census classifications. Copies of the Career Choice Questionnaire and the Role Model Questionnaire may be obtained from the authors.

Procedure. Permission was obtained to attend scholarship hall meetings. The investigator told the women that she was collecting information about the attitudes of women. The volunteers were given a booklet with the instruments and a consent form that they completed and returned to the investigator. No time limit was imposed; it took volunteers approximately one hour to complete the instruments.

Analysis. To analyze the data three separate statistical procedures were used. Hypothesis 1 was tested through the use of a t-test; hypothesis 2, a z test for differences between proportions, and hypothesis 3 was tested by correlational analysis. The .05 level of probability was used to determine significance.

Results and Discussion

Hypothesis 1. To test the first hypothesis, whether there was a significant difference in sex-role attitude scores of the traditional and non-traditional group, mean scores on the Revised Fand Sex-Role Inventory were contrasted. A t-test between means found no significant difference between the two groups. It was anticipated that the women in the nontraditional group would have a less traditional view of women's roles than women in the traditional group; the analysis indicated that women in the non-traditional group were no more self-oriented in their attitude toward women's roles ($\bar{X} = 67.6$) than women in the traditional group ($\bar{X} = 67.8$).

One possible explanation for this result may be that this generation of women, reared during the women's movement, has a more egalitarian attitude about roles for men and women. An alternate explanation may be the method used to determine whether the subjects were traditional or nontraditional; a choice of major may not necessarily reflect a sex-role orientation. It is possible, for example, that one can be an elementary education major (traditional) and yet have a strong feminist viewpoint about women's place in society.

Hypothesis 2. A z test was used to test the hypothesis that the proportion of women who aspired to obtain graduate degrees and who reported that their mothers worked would not be significantly different from chance (50% of this group would have working mothers; 50% would not). The test of this hypothesis yielded a significant z value ($z = 2.67, p < .05$). For this sample of 109 women, 71 reported that they aspired to earn a graduate degree. Of these 71 women, 47 (66%) reported that their mothers worked. The observed proportion of women who aspired to earn graduate degrees and who had working mothers was too large to be explained by chance.

This finding supports Banducci (1967), who suggests a trend for daughters of working mothers to have higher educational aspirations and a desire to combine homemaking and careers in their own lives. Since higher educational levels tend to be associated with greater involvement in the work force (U.S. Census, 1985), the higher educational aspirations of daughters with working mothers may reflect their mothers' educational attainment. It may also suggest that working mothers act as positive role models.

Hypothesis 3. The third hypothesis examined the relationship between scores on the Revised Fand Sex-Role Attitude Inventory and the Role Model Questionnaire; it was tested by a Pearson product moment correlation. The analysis indicated low scores on the Revised Fand (which indicated a non-traditional sex role orientation) were associated with high scores on the Role Model Questionnaire (which indicated that the daughter did not perceive her mother as a positive role model) ($r = -.18$). Altman and Grossman (1977) suggest that a mother, even when a negative role model, can influence a daughter's life choices. These authors explain the concept of negative role modeling; daughters see their "at home" mothers as unhappy and adopt life plans that stress career and deemphasize home-oriented values. Daughters of working mothers who see them with frustrated career potential in traditional female roles may also choose to be more career-oriented than their mothers were.

Implications

There is a need for more investigation of factors which contribute to the development of women. Counselors need more information about the factors that affect the educational and career choice of women so that they can help women to explore their options; this becomes more important as more women

enter the work force and stay for longer periods of time. The findings of this study suggest that women may be self-oriented and still prefer a traditional profession; to encourage them to choose in another manner would be discrimination.

When discussing whether or not a woman wishes to enter graduate school a counselor needs to be aware that some researchers have found that it is the daughters of working mothers who aspire more often to graduate degrees (Banducci, 1967). Yet it is important that all women who have the desire and the ability be encouraged to pursue graduate degrees.

The significant correlational analysis suggests that low scores on the Fand (which indicated a nontraditional sex role orientation) were associated with high scores on the Role Model Questionnaire which indicated that the daughter did not perceive the mother as a positive role model. Counselors need to remember that mothers may be negative as well as positive role models.

There is a need to continue to investigate factors that contribute to the career development of women if a theory of career development for women is to emerge. Specifically, research needs to identify the role models that women emulate, the importance women place on interpersonal and family relationships at different stages in their development, and the factors that influence their career decision-making.

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